



Students can find a Web of opportunity at KVHS

By Jim Waters

Regular readers of this column know I consistently criticize Kentucky's faltering education system, always hoping for dramatic change — any change — so students get the tools they need to succeed.

However, one of the few things about the education system that shouldn't change is the Department of Education's [Kentucky Virtual High School](#), a first-rate — but extremely underutilized — Web-based program for high school students. It only needs a more effective marketing plan.

We're not talking here about online computer classes delivered via dial-up. In fact, KVHS goes beyond nontraditional-age students. The potential for online learning is limitless for the younger set, too.

OK, class: Raise your hand if you knew about KVHS, which offers 70 different courses online that run the gamut of degrees of difficulty — from remedial to Advanced Placement-level.

No other school choice program rivals its flexibility. And certainly, no traditional classroom can possibly provide such a wide range of options for such a diverse student population.

A legitimate complaint from parents to school-choice supporters is that there aren't good alternative schools for academically gifted children. They have a point.

Charter schools often cater to children from low-income homes at risk of falling through the cracks of our traditional public education system. In fact, charter-school laws often limit enrollment to those students.

The good news about [virtual schools](#) such as KVHS is the myriad options they offer. KVHS gives students the chance to take their entire course load — including all Advanced Placement classes — online.

Others — in fact a majority of last year's KVHS students — used a [hybrid plan](#) that allowed them to attend traditional classes in their school and to do at least 40 percent of their work online. Even advanced middle-schoolers can take courses at a higher level that might not otherwise be available in their traditional school, especially in smaller districts with fewer course offerings.

But like magic, the same program that offers gifted students the opportunity to soar toward early college credit can also help provide students facing situations — such as a medical condition that confines them, incarceration or a dire family or work situation — to stay on a path toward graduation.

OK, class: What other educational program gives young scholars so many options?

KVHS offers the flexibility that allows early birds to take their math test as roosters crow and more nocturnal students the option of doing their science project at 9 p.m. The lifestyles now led by many Kentuckians make that kind of freedom attractive. Besides, who cares *when* the geometry gets done, just as long as it does?

Yet, it's tough to comprehend the untapped potential of these programs. Out of the approximately 636,000 students enrolled in Kentucky's public education system last year, fewer than 3,300 participated in KVHS. The program even suffered a 1.5-percent budget cut this year.

But it appears that virtual opportunities are becoming a higher priority in Frankfort.

"We're getting more of a focus on how to improve and expand virtual schooling in Kentucky," said Kiley Whitaker, a resource management analyst with the state education department who works with the KVHS program. "We want to bring in all of our district partners (that have local virtual programs) and get them at a table and come up with legislation and address how to improve policies and the infrastructure. We want to have an actual marketing plan in place so that once funding is available we can be prepared to expand."

Like any good idea, KVHS needs an effective marketing plan. If that happens, look out. Such an option could bring needed change throughout Kentucky's education system.

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